

assistance with this process, consult HPO or the ADA Coordinator of the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs.

3. Identify and evaluate accessibility options that will preserve historic features:

The goal is to identify and select an option that allows accessibility to persons with disabilities while preserving the historic features and character of the property. Alternative solutions for accessibility may be considered during this interactive process. HPO and other agencies like the DC Office of Disability Rights may be able to assist owners with this process.

### If You Need Relief from Preservation Standards

The Americans with Disabilities Act, Fair Housing Act, and other civil rights laws establish standards and procedures to ensure equal access to historic properties.

If you seek to modify or alter your dwelling in a manner that HPO or HPRB have found inconsistent with historic preservation standards, you have the right to request a reasonable accommodation in the application of these standards. A reasonable accommodation may allow you to modify or alter the historic property in the manner you seek.

Under FHA, a “reasonable accommodation” is a change, exception, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service that may be

necessary for a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, including public and common use spaces. The District of Columbia grants a reasonable accommodation if the request is made by or on behalf of a person with a disability, there is a disability-related need for the accommodation, and the request would not fundamentally alter the nature of the District’s historic preservation laws, policies or programs.

Forms for requesting a reasonable accommodation are available from HPO, DCRA, or the DC Office of Disability Rights.

The District of Columbia has a rich diversity of architectural and historical heritage. The buildings that represent this heritage range from modest row houses to impressive government structures.

### Why is Preservation Important?

Historic preservation helps to ensure that the nation's capital remains a beautiful city and a desirable place to live. Historic architecture and a rich diversity of neighborhoods are essential elements of the city’s broad appeal and help to support continued economic vitality.

### Why is Fair Housing Important?

Persons with disabilities have a right to have equal access to, and an equal opportunity to use and enjoy housing. Accessibility is the key to fair housing.

### For More Information:

Please contact the ADA Coordinator for the following agencies for concerns or more information related to accessibility of historic properties in the District of Columbia or fair housing rights:

#### Historic Preservation Office

Office of Planning  
1100 4th Street, SW  
Suite E650  
Washington, DC 20024  
(202) 442-7600  
[www.planning.dc.gov](http://www.planning.dc.gov)



#### Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

1100 4th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024  
(202) 442-4400  
[www.dkra.dc.gov](http://www.dkra.dc.gov)

If you wish to make a complaint related to disability discrimination, please contact:

#### DC Office of Disability Rights

441 4th Street, NW  
Suite 729 North  
Washington, DC 20001  
(202) 724-5055 (voice)  
(202) 727-3363 (TTY)  
[www.odr.dc.gov](http://www.odr.dc.gov)

*For individuals with disabilities, please contact the HPO to obtain this information in alternative formats.*

## Accommodating Persons with Disabilities in Historic Properties



## Creating Accessibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Fair Housing Act



Government of the District of Columbia

The District of Columbia government holds a fundamental interest in both historic preservation and equal access for all persons regardless of disability. Unfortunately, many historic buildings were not designed to be readily accessible to persons with disabilities. With careful planning, however, it is possible to preserve the historic character of these properties while also making them accessible to persons with disabilities, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, Fair Housing Act, and other civil rights laws.

The DC Historic Preservation Office (HPO) and Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) can help in identifying successful ways to make historic buildings accessible to everyone. HPO and HPRB preservation standards address accessibility considerations, and their procedures are aimed at providing accessibility for persons with disabilities in a way that is also sensitive to historic preservation concerns.

### Historic Properties in the District of Columbia

The DC Inventory of Historic Sites is the official list of historic properties recognized by the District of Columbia. Through a public process, HPRB designates historic landmarks and historic districts for inclusion on this list. The Inventory protects nearly 600 landmark buildings and more than 40 historic districts, totaling about 25,000 properties. A historic

property is one that is a designated historic landmark or contributes to the character of a designated historic district.

HPO is the staff for HPRB and can answer questions about the DC Inventory. HPO can identify any historic property by street address, and provide maps of historic districts. Additional information about historic properties is posted on HPO's website. HPO can also explain the significance of a particular historic property and help identify its significant historic and architectural features.

### Getting a Permit to Alter Historic Property

Most exterior accessibility modifications require a DC building permit. If the work involves a historic property, the permit application must also be reviewed by HPO or HPRB, depending on the nature of the work involved. HPO can usually handle smaller modifications, but major work may require HPRB review.

When conducting its review, HPO and HPRB apply preservation standards in the context of accessibility criteria like the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). HPO and HPRB may recommend different approaches to achieve accessibility, including options that comply with ADAAG's alternative minimum requirements for historic buildings.

### Process for Making Historic Buildings Accessible

#### How to plan for accessibility

Historic properties are distinguished by features that establish their historic character. To protect these features, a three-step process is recommended when considering accessibility modifications:

1. Review the significance of the property and identify historic features:

HPO maintains information on the historic and architectural significance of historic properties. There are standard preservation procedures to identify and describe the physical features that are

important to the character of a historic property or historic district. In most cases, significant features include the form, materials, and design of the front and prominent sides of the property.

2. Assess the property's existing and required level of accessibility:

An existing conditions analysis of the property should be conducted to assess its accessibility. This review should identify areas that may not be accessible to persons with disabilities. Care should be taken to follow local building codes and federal laws related to accessibility, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Fair Housing Act (FHA). For



**This ramp provides access to the forecourt of a church on 16th Street, an important meeting space for the congregation before and after services. A second ramp provides access to the building.**